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U.S. High Tech Drained Away By the Soviets

Like sticky-fingered kids turned loose in a candy store, the Soviets are looting the West of its high technology. They are using the information to develop sophisticated weapons and modernize their industrial plants. Yet members of Congress and the business community seem determined to encourage this high-tech drain.

U.S. officials believe that more than 150 Soviet weapons systems contain technology derived from western sources. One secret Pentagon report lists two dozen methods the Soviets have used to obtain this material. They range from legal purchase to theft.

The report, seen by my associates Michael Binstein and Dale Van Atta, mentions 14 specific areas where U.S. technology has helped the Soviets "to develop new generations of smart weapons, to dramatically improve their airlift capability, to make their nuclear weapons more accurate and to enhance their command and control with better computers and communications."

Glomming onto western high-tech material is a booming industry in the

Soviet Union. U.S. officials estimate that the Kremlin has 20,000 people engaged in acquiring and analyzing western-produced systems. Most of the 135 Soviet citizens kicked out of 21 nations last year were trying to obtain high-tech secrets.

The most effective way to stanch the hemorrhage of vital technology to the Soviets would be to strengthen the Export Administration Act, which expired last year. Instead, the House has passed a poorly crafted bill, sponsored by Rep. Don Bonker (D-Wash.), that would seriously weaken U.S. export controls.

A basic flaw in the Bonker legislation is its blithe presumption that COCOM, the Paris-based Coordinating Committee of NATO members, has been doing a good job of controlling high-tech exports to the Soviet bloc. It hasn't.

One of Bonker's colleagues, Rep. Toby Roth (R-Wis.), has pointed out this weakness in the legislation, which is now in Senate-House conference. Roth notes that there's not a single report or survey claiming that our European and Japanese allies are effectively policing either their own technology exports or re-exports of U.S. goods.

Quite the contrary, in fact, one of the few studies on the subject—by the Atlantic Institute in Paris—cites the existence of "a thriving and lucrative business based on surreptitious sale of strategic and military

technology to the Soviet Union and eastern Europe." The report's author was told by a U.S. customs agent in Europe: "Everything I touch turns to gold. Every lead uncovers illegal sales."

The report concludes ominously: "In view of the exceedingly lax enforcement efforts by certain COCOM countries, the cases that are detected and investigated may represent only the 'tip of the iceberg'"

Roth believes that items classified as "Militarily Critical Technologies" are simply too numerous to be controlled. Instead of presenting a reasonable list of these critical items, the Pentagon labored and brought forth a mountainous, 700-page volume. The result is that the Customs Service and Commerce Department waste valuable time and effort going after low-grade, obsolescent computers when they could be watching for highly sensitive items.

The CIA has a list of the items the Soviets want most—the gourmet products in the high-tech supermarket instead of the bottles of ketchup. Recognizing the need for selectivity, Roth and his allies are trying to put through an amendment narrowing the list of controlled exports in return for stricter enforcement. But business interests are trying to kill the amendment, hoping to get rid of many existing controls on grounds that they're ineffective.